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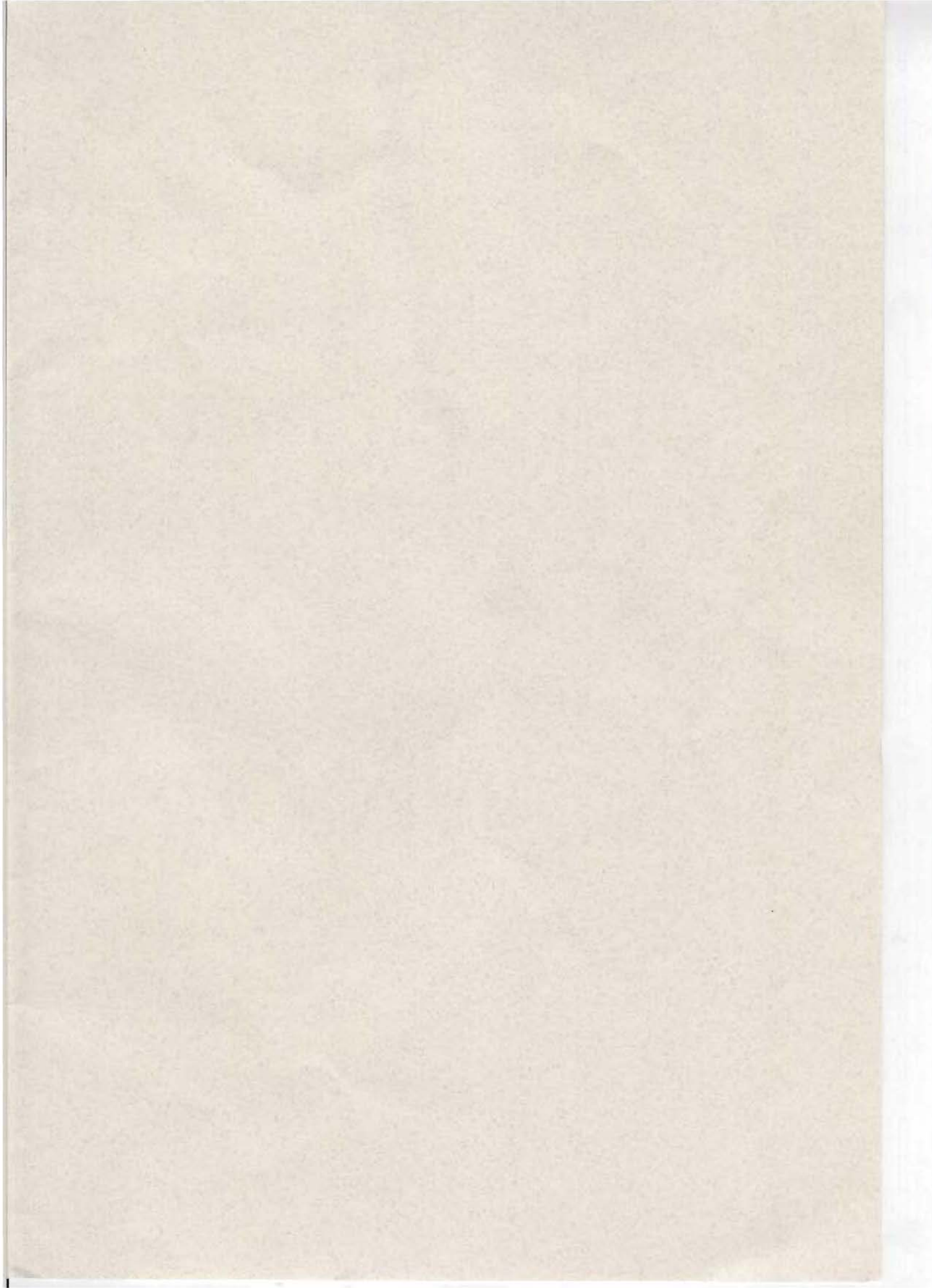
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WINTER 1994



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Jason McQuinn

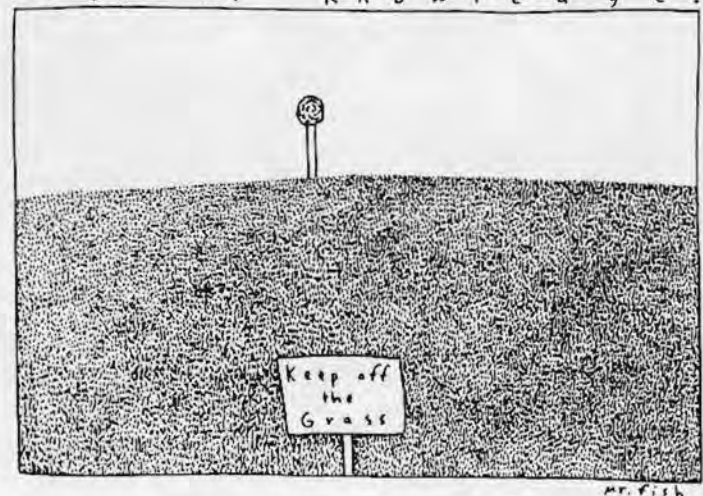
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T r e e o f K n o w l e d g e .



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The editing and production of *Information and Social Change* will change each issue: this issue has been edited and produced by Chris Atton.

The cover and the inside front and back pages were designed by Fernando Pacheco Bellas, incorporating "Tree of Knowledge" by Mr. Fish. Other illustrations are by John Yates, and are taken from his book "Stealworks" (Edinburgh: AK Press and Active Distribution, 1994). We'd like to thank all three for offering their work so generously.

We welcome contributions in our field. Read the journal to gauge our interests. If you're in doubt, write to us with suggestions. Whilst encouraging rigorous debate, the journal exists primarily for workers and practitioners, and so simple and clear english is preferable. Articles, should, where possible, be between 500 and 2500 words. This is to ensure a wide coverage of topics in each issue. However longer articles may be excerpted in the journal and the full text made available from the author(s), if you wish. We also welcome reviews, letters and news items.

We intend to publish twice a year. Individual subscription for a year is £5.00. Institutional rate is £15.00. Free to exchanging journals. Enquire for overseas rates. Please make cheques payable to "C.F. Atton".

Editorial

It is a truism to say that information in all its forms is now a commodity, to be packaged and sold, along with all the other products of our age, in the high street superstores. As this commodification increases, so it is increasingly easy to forget that information has value far beyond the commercial world. It has a value as an agent for social change, for development, as it introduces people to ideas, creates forums for debate and speaks of the possibilities that are open to us - were we only permitted to know of them.

The possibilities for change available to the people of the South, for instance, reside in the media ownership of ideas through the channels of CNN and Voice of America: a distorted, pro-capitalist view of the world, where the only mention of your own country is to tell you how dreadful it is (Voice of America on Cuba is the classic example). In the countries of the North media manipulation is more refined.

The ways by which information is controlled and mediated have a serious influence on the ways people think, how they communicate, what they believe is the "real world", what the limits of the permissible are. This applies equally to information that comes through the channels of the mass media, through our bookshops or through our libraries. Government control through freedom of information and censorship is only the beginning. The managers and commissars, the guardians and disseminators of this information, are all responsible to ensure that access to information is there for all.

Of course free and equal access to information is a myth throughout the world, although different situations pertain in different countries. Control is more explicit and cruder in some places, more "sophisticated" and more invisible elsewhere (for example, in Britain). One of the aims of this journal (and the group that shares its name) is to document these situations. But we want to go further than that, documenting also the *alternatives* to this control, the radical and progressive channels by which truly unfettered, *unmediated* ideas may circulate. And further still: to encourage information workers to come together, to share ideas, to foster these alternatives - whether we are publishers, librarians, booksellers, communication workers or distributors.

Reading through the proofs of this first issue it strikes me that, of the articles I have chosen, none of them deals directly with Britain. This might seem strange, since most of us involved in this project live and work here, and it is largely as a response to the situation in our own country that we started this journal.

Future issues will focus on Britain, inevitably, but we should not forget how much we can learn from other countries. I think the diversity of this first issue emphasises that, as well as establishing the general areas in which the journal will work. In this first issue we have outlined what we consider to be our main aims. But as others join us, we expect those aims and those interests to widen. Whoever you are, if you are in sympathy with us, join us.

Organising an Alternative Press Display for Local Libraries

Jason McQuinn

Libraries in Columbia, Missouri carry an abysmal number of alternative press book and periodical titles. The situation is probably just like many other places, except that besides a good-sized regional (county) library there is a major university library system (for the University of Missouri's central campus) and two well-established private college libraries (Stephens College and Columbia College). With four major libraries like these, a town of 65,000 ought to be well-stocked with contemporary books and periodicals from across the spectrum of perspectives. But, like most other places in the US, it's not.

How can one person even start to change this situation? As a result of my contact with Charles Willett and the CRISES Alternative Press Exhibit at the San Francisco ALA conference last year, I decided that one way to start might be to organise an alternative press display and make the rounds of the local libraries with it. At one stroke library patrons could be introduced to alternative materials they might otherwise never see and librarians would be forced to confront the question of why, for the most part, these materials aren't in their collections. And at the CRISES Press display the opportunity was there to obtain a well-rounded selection of periodicals by requesting sample copies through the sign-up sheet.

Three months later I began to accumulate these samples. I compiled a computerised listing of titles, addresses, descriptions and subscription information. And I set about planning the first display for the Daniel Boone Regional Library a short distance from my home. I asked a university-affiliated group with a definite interest in the alternative press, the Committee Against Intervention, to co-sponsor the display and lend it more legitimacy. Not knowing what to expect, I was surprised to learn that an old friend was now in charge of public relations for the library.

She confided in me that the library "couldn't" stock very many alternative titles because they were so frequently stolen, had their pages ripped out, or were rendered otherwise unreadable by, it was suspected, the local Christian fundamentalists. The situation was so bad that one of the few alternative periodicals stocked, *American Atheist* magazine, had to be kept locked away in a librarian's desk, available only by leaving a copy of one's ID until it was returned. All mainstream or conservative periodicals were openly available for browsing at any time. She also confided that, if there ever was any, there was *no longer* any chance of the periodical I help edit, *Anarchy* magazine, being carried by the library. This was because library gossip had it that a ripped-out page from the magazine with a "Mr. Fish" cartoon -

carrying the caption "What responsibility would look like if it wasn't obscene" and showing a drawing of a penis with a condom in place - was found in the library's unobservable "makeout corner."

I thought having a friend in this position was a stroke of luck at first, until she steered me to another level of the bureaucracy, from which I was pointed back again in her direction. After a couple of weeks of this runaround, I made it clear that I would not accept "no" for an answer. The only question was: When would I be able to set up the display? At that point everything quickly fell into place. I rebuffed an attempt to move the display to an out-of-the-way area of the library where few people would be likely to see it, insisting that it should remain in the front lobby. After I submitted a list of the periodicals to be displayed, dates were set and I typeset and photocopied a hundred colourful handouts listing the subscription information I'd compiled. I sent out press releases to local newspapers and for local alternative and educational radio stations to read as Public Service Announcements. And I awaited the set-up and opening day.

In the meantime, it turned out that the week preceding the display was "Banned Books Week", to be observed by the library through a display of banned books and an informational lecture. I was unable to attend, but found out after the fact that the featured speaker, Harry James Cargas of Webster University in St. Louis, delivered a bland homily on quality, intimating that some forms of censorship might not be so bad. In fact his major point, according to a friend who sat through the lecture, was that individuals may validly want to censor in their own homes what nevertheless shouldn't be censored society-wide,

giving rationales for self-censorship derived from theological authorities. He then proceeded to read passages from some "quality" books that were being banned from school libraries and other places. My friend, having expected a civil-libertarian attack on censorship, had come to the lecture with a few alternative magazines that were unavailable in local libraries or bookstores. At this point he felt compelled to confront Cargas on his pusillanimity over the broader questions he was evading. He pulled out his copies of *ReSearch*, *Anarchy* and *On Our Backs*, went to the front of the room and argued that the real problem of censorship was much more subtle as well as much more important and widespread. "Large corporations control what you can see... they control what is published and what is distributed. Alternative presses can publish, but they can't get distribution, they are not available in libraries, and that is a more serious problem. It's a loss to society that alternative points of view are simply not available." Cargas ignored this interruption and when it ended he continued reading passages from "quality" works. My friend interrupted again and interjected: "You can get *Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn*. You're always talking about banned books that really aren't banned. They're widely available and not banned in the larger social setting. Why not talk about things that are *really* banned by invisibility? Lots of things are not available in any real way because of large corporations that control what can be seen." This time Cargas at least acknowledged the argument by saying, "Well, you've made that point," before continuing with his irrelevant readings.

The confrontation at this lecture set the stage for a bit of anxiety on the part of the library staff dealing with the

Questions to Think About

How many of these periodicals have you ever heard of before?

How many of them have you ever seen?

How many of them have you heard of, but never had a chance to see?

How many of them do you think other people (who won't see this display) will ever see or hear of?

Why are so few of these periodicals available in local libraries?

Why are so few of them available in local bookshops and newsagents?

Is there a "conspiracy of silence" in mainstream institutions and media concerning the alternative press?

Whose interests do alternative publications usually challenge?

Whose interests do they champion?

Who owns the mainstream media?

Who owns the major bookstore chains?

Who controls library budgets and acquisitions by libraries?

display. However, despite the free availability for browsing of the fifty periodicals I placed on display, no unruly crowds or confrontations developed, and the display proceeded quietly. In fact, surprisingly, not a single copy of any of the periodicals was stolen, defaced or torn. I checked and straightened the display every day while it lasted. Probably the most controversial thing about the whole display was the sign I made listing "Questions to Think About."

As it turned out, after the initial problems setting up the first display, the second - at the main library of the University of Missouri - was relatively uneventful. Once again a list of periodicals was required before permission was granted to display them, without any indication given of what might qualify a periodical for exclusion. Unfortunately, since this display would be in a high-traffic area, since neither I nor the library staff would be able to keep a close eye on it, and since the display space did not allow it, the periodicals would not be available for browsing. Set up on simple wire stands on shelves behind glass doors, the fifty or so periodicals made an impressive and colourful display, along with the several signs and list of questions I included. More handouts were photocopied for distribution during the two months that this display lasted. Midway through the display, the stands holding up the periodicals suddenly disappeared - apparently claimed by another display. But I quickly made replacement cardboard cutout stands, returning most of the magazines to their much more noticeable upright positions. Otherwise, this display also passed

without problems, with apparently only those genuinely interested taking the handouts, which were periodically replenished. At the point at which I'm writing, displays in the other libraries are still to be arranged.

Was it worth it? For a relatively small, but concentrated, amount of effort, hundreds - if not thousands - of library patrons and significant proportions of two library staffs were able to see the display. The questions were provocative enough to elicit comments from the staff I spoke with. Well over a hundred handouts, listing complete subscription information for all the periodicals, were distributed. And both library staffs took pains to check and let me know how pitifully few (or, from their point of view, proudly, *how many*) of the periodicals they had in their collections. If I recall correctly it was four in the first (although I could only locate three in the catalogue) and five or six in the second (although this was counting a couple of very old, uncatalogued copies of *Anarchy* that were tucked away in a locked, unlabelled room full of old underground papers from the sixties on the top floor of the library where no one who didn't already know of their existence could ever find them). I doubt that the libraries have suddenly started ordering subscriptions to alternative press titles. And there's no way of knowing if many of those who took subscription information actually followed through and subscribed to any of them. But, at the least, many more people were introduced to the fact that an alternative press actually exists, even if it remains largely invisible in Columbia, Missouri.

Jason McQuinn is editor of *Alternative Press Review*. This article first appeared in *Librarians at Liberty*, 1(1), June 1993.

Whatever Happened to the Rare Books?

Fred Whitehead

In 1964, Edward Dahlberg published his autobiography, *Because I Was Flesh*, to immediate and nearly universal acclaim. In that book, Dahlberg recollected his poverty-stricken childhood in Kansas City, as the son of a lady barber; its language, paradoxically, was by turns lyrical and richly ornate, densely laden with adages culled from the world's best *belles lettres*. Though still in print, Dahlberg's greatest work is not currently available in any bookstore in Kansas City. He once remarked that he would have stayed here if there had been two people he could have talked with about books.

The Texas iconoclast William Cowper Brann observed of the place in the 1980s that "the arms of Kansas City are a gallon jug rampant, a fat porker regardant, a blood pudding couchant, and the motto, 'There's nothing like licker and lard.'" That was in the era of stockyards and packinghouses, but to this day, there is nothing that drives our local elite so crazy as to be nationally regarded as a "cow town." Yet, the current dissolution of the Kansas City Missouri Public Library's rare books collection suggests that our status is, unfortunately, well deserved.

In 1990, library director Dan Bradbury divulged his proposal to sell this collection at auction, on the grounds that it was rarely used by the public, and that proceeds from the sale could go to buy new books. This provoked a response from taxpaying patrons of the library, who formed an

emergency committee, which appeared before the Board of Trustees on two occasions. Only one member of the Board had any response at all: Dr. Jeremiah Cameron, a respected African-American teacher, spoke eloquently against the sale, stating that "Mr. Bradbury is the only librarian I have ever known who doesn't like books." On October 15, 1991, the Board voted to approve the sale. Since several new members were appointed to the Board early in 1992, a further appeal was made on March 17, with the presentation of petitions signed by 391 readers. Again, Dr. Cameron, in opposition, was the only member of the Board to have any comment. Subsequently, the library commenced shipping books to New York City where their sale to the highest bidder began on May 7 at the Swann Galleries. Mr. George S. Lowry, President at Swann, responded to a protest by saying that these kinds of books really belonged at a place like Harvard, which would appreciate and take care of them.

The KCMO rare books collection was mostly acquired through public funds in 1953, from the estate of the eccentric Nebraska bibliophile Thomas Jefferson Fitzpatrick (Robert P. Vosper in the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 1961). Fitzpatrick's scientific books went to the University of Kansas, but most of the rest came to Kansas City. A rather miscellaneous collection, it included odd volumes of 18th. century Spanish religious

sermons, etc., but also first editions of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Priestley, Fielding, Jefferson and others. The collection was strong in Americana, books that any good liberal arts college or university would be proud to possess. Researching in the collection for a book I later published on American freethought, I found an illustrated edition of Holmes' "one hoss shay" poem that was available nowhere else in the Kansa City area (not even at the nearby University of Kansas). The books were kept either in locked cases in the library's Board room or in the office of the director. Many were not even catalogued, and there were never any attempts to mount public exhibitions from the collection, or even to inform the public of their existence. Thus, director Bradbury's statement that they were little used was self-fulfilling.

The emergency committee of readers appealed locally for review of this entire matter, but the only metropolitan daily, the *Kansa City Star*, maintained editorial silence. With one or two exceptions, librarians would say nothing in opposition. Letters were written to community leaders, without result. Our generally progressive African-American mayor, Emanuel Cleaver, had no comment, apparently believing that it was strictly a matter for the library Board. The Hallmark Foundation stated that they "would not be involved". Janice C. Kreamer of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and Affiliated Trusts allowed that "the issue of rare book preservation is somewhat outside our main lines of interest." Ms. Mary Ann Van Vooren, "marketing coordinator" for the library, wrote that "rare books do not fit within the mission of a public library, especially one which serves a large inner-city population." Aside from the elitism and racism of this

statement, Ms. Van Vooren appears completely ignorant of the rare books collections in the great public libraries of such American cities as New York, Boston and Cleveland.

The committee further appealed to the professional library community across the country, for a full-scale peer review of the board's decision. Dean Herbert S. White of Indiana University's library school said that he "would not be in a position to judge the appropriateness of the sale of these books." However, Peter Hanff of the Bancroft Library at Berkeley wrote forthrightly that "it pains me to see [such] threats.... It is hard for me to believe that so venerable a city as Kansas City is unable to sustain resarch-level collections in its central public library." Hanff provided information on how Governor Ronald Reagan has seriously made a similar proposal to sell off the rare books of the University of California, and though this was stopped, "there was no indication that the Governor ever understood the actual significance of research collections as part of the cultural heritage of the state." John Swan, head librarian at Bennington College in Vermont, responded sympathetically, stating that all the issues of ethics, professional standards, responsibility to the public, and peer review were heating up within the profession.

However, letters to the American Library Association went unanswered for many months. Finally, a response from Judith F. Krug, director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, stated that "to the best of my knowledge, public libraries are free to dispose of elements of their collections as they see fit, consistent with law, as well as with policy set by local governing authorities. I cannot recognise an issue of professional ethics in the situation you have described in

your letter - a management decision was made by professional librarians and approved by their board." Krug enclosed the ALA's book *Guide to Review of Library Collections: Preservation, Storage, and Withdrawal*.

This guide has some curious recommendations, including that "academic, public, and school libraries have an obligation to retain materials that provide research, curricular, programmatic, or community support." From this, it appears that public libraries *should* support research. Furthermore, the guide states that "while users may be minimally helpful in identifying candidates for deselections, they can be invaluable in reviewing items chosen. For example, where feasible, titles identified through a circulation study may be reviewed by faculty or other patrons." Among those opposing the Kansas City sale were professors at our two medical schools, the eminent Missouri author William Least Heat Moon, novelist Robert Day, college and university teachers, historians, and so on - the very people who the ALA guide states ought to be involved in any "deselection." When an official of the ALA is not even familiar with the provisions of the guide she is distributing to the public, peer review has clearly failed.

A number of important issues bearing on librarians as professionals arise out of the Kansas City case. A profession is generally regarded as "self-policing" to a considerable extent. Thus, physicians judge the credentials of other physicians, attorneys admit their new colleagues to the bar, etc. However, there are also mechanisms for review of incompetence or seriously bad judgement in both these fields. An impaired physician can lose his medical license. A lawyer who abuses or

exploits funds entrusted to him in an estate can be disciplined or disbarred. But what happens when librarians or their boards abuse the public trust or blithely ignore hundreds of readers who after all paid for the books through their taxes? In medicine there are scores, perhaps hundreds, of organisations to support patients with all manner of diseases and syndromes, but who will come to the aid of readers and researchers? It is obviously too late to save Kansas City's rare books, but will any lessons be drawn from our "worst-case scenario"?

Around the world, "privatisation" of cultural resources and treasures is reaching unprecedented levels. There are many accounts of tomb-robbers making off with artifacts, but this is also going on every day in our own literary culture. At a local community college library sale, scores of biographies of "minor" writers were stacked in rows on tables - I bought a fine old tome on Heinrich Heine and similarly rescued about 30 others, for a dime apiece. At the KMCO "Friends of the Library" sale last November, on the last day, one of the nice ladies running it announced that there would be a "special" at 11 a.m.; instead of costing \$1 each, books would go for a dime and at that rate, she said, they would be a good buy for insualtion. I had a sudden vision of the Salvador Dali edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* I had left there, wedged into a stack lining the wall of a mule barn someplace out in the Missouri countryside. Legend has it that barbarians looted the great library of ancient Alexandria, but today, to a considerable extent, it is the librarians themselves who are discarding our literary treasures. The January 1992 issue of *Library Journal* announced that Dan Bradbury, director of the Kansas City Missouri Public Library,

was its choice for Librarian of the Year, stating that he "was not afraid to be controversial or political." And the *Kansas City Star* thought it was indeed quite an honour, citing Bradbury that

"if you see a brick wall in front of you, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to realize you have to get around the wall."

This article first appeared in *Journal of Information Ethics* 2(2), Fall 1993. Fred Whitehead is the editor of *Freethought History* and *People's Culture*.

Message of Support to *Information for Social Change* on the Occasion of its Launch, 19 November 1994

Members of the Library and Information Workers Organisation (LIWO) in South Africa extend to all those involved in the launch of *Information for Social Change* solidarity and congratulations. From our own experience we know the value of a vehicle for the ideas of the voiceless, the dissenting and the unorthodox in a profession that is all too often dominated by unthinking conformism. We see *Information for Social Change* as another component in the international linkage of critical thought in library and information work, salute your initiative and wish it all the very best.

Mangoes and Eggs: A Cautionary Tale

Report from the Residential Conference on Emerging Democracies and Freedom of Information, Somerville College, Oxford, 2-4 September 1994

John Pateman

What do mangoes and eggs have to do with a library conference about emerging democracies? They emerged as symbols of capitalism and communism during the International Group of the Library Association's weekend school. The tone was set by Russell Bowden, First Vice-President of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). In his report on this year's IFLA conference in Havana and the "implications for Cuban democracy", Russell failed to mention the general election held in Cuba in February 1993. 99% of the population took part and only 7% spoilt their ballot papers in protest against the government. 585 of the 589 candidates polled more than 90% of the vote. The Communist Party had no role in the nomination of candidates, nor were candidates to be members of the Party. 83% of the members entered the National Assembly for the first time. 23% were women, 24% workers, 10% farmers. Only 6% were party members. Russell also didn't refer to Cuban local government, where there are Committees for the Defence of the Revolution which operate at street level and run important local services such as road cleaning and refuse collection.

Russell was more interested in the fact that he couldn't get mangoes for breakfast. To him this represented the failure of socialism. Such was the level of analysis we were to see repeated throughout the weekend. While admitting that the US blockade caused terrible problems in Cuba, Russell was critical of what he called the Cubans' "paranoia". Wouldn't you be paranoid if you were under constant threat from an immensely powerful neighbour that has: invaded your country (Bay of Pigs, 1962); threatened nuclear war (Missile Crisis, 1962); introduced disease to destroy crops and kill livestock; attempted to assassinate your head of state on numerous occasions; sabotaged factories, cane fields and power supplies; maintained an illegal presence (Guantanamo Bay); beamed in thousands of anti-Cuban broadcasts (Radio and TV Marti); all this *in addition to* the illegal blockade of all goods including food and medicines for over 30 years.

On my visit to Cuba in 1993 I saw no sign of the secret police who Russell said arrested Cubans who spoke to tourists. As for the security at hotels he spoke of, this is typical in all developing countries where the conspicuous wealth of tourists attracts criminal elements and tempts those

who have so little. Tourism is a double-edged sword in Cuba. It brings in much needed hard currency, but it has also brought back prostitution and crime.

Even the triumphs of the Revolution - universal health care and education - were given grudging praise by Russell. He noted the extent to which the Soviet Union supported Cuba, claiming that this is what paid for the hospitals and schools. But the real point, surely, is that Castro chose to spend this money on the people instead of on himself or on weapons, unlike the many tin-pot dictators propped up by the West. The Cuban health and education systems are not only better than in any other developing country, they are also better than in many developed countries. Infant mortality in Havana, for example, is lower than in Washington, D.C. Cubans live to an average age of 75 and are entitled to a free education up to graduate level. They have trained doctors and teachers to spread literacy and health care in other developing countries. The hospitals have been opened to the Chernobyl victims. They lead the world in some medical fields and have patented a vaccine for meningitis.

The criticism of socialist countries continued at the session on China. Ms. Bing Sum Lao from the University of Westminster Library claimed that China only scored 23% against a set of human rights criteria. The fact that the UK scored 93% does put a question mark against those criteria. Do they include the right to food, shelter, health care and literacy? Without these freedoms, the freedom to information is meaningless. The UK is often cited as a free country, yet Oxfam has now given it 'Third World' status and is now setting up projects to feed the ever growing numbers of poor people in these islands.

On the subject of leagues tables, 89% of children in China receive what UNESCO defines as a basic education. This compares favourably with Bangladesh (51%), Brazil (50%), India (68%), Indonesia (88%), Mexico (82%), Nigeria (71%) and Pakistan (52%). The number of children in school is also impressive. Since the founding of New China in 1949, the Chinese government has sought to provide basic education and eradicate illiteracy in a planned, incremental way. The nine-year compulsory education programme has been implemented and China's illiteracy rate has dropped from 80% in 1949 to 16% in 1990. The goal - education for all in China by 2000 - lies clearly ahead.

When the conference turned its attention to Eastern Europe a stark contrast emerged. If socialism came to be symbolised by mangoes in Cuba, capitalism was represented by a dozen eggs in Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of Communism salaries have become meaningless and the monthly salary of a professional librarian is worth no more than a dozen eggs. Alongside the collapsed economies there has been the widespread destruction of infrastructures and the ravages of war fuelled by emergent nationalism.

When considering libraries and freedom of information in so-called emerging democracies a number of contradictions emerged. Dr. Tamar Dragadze of the University of London encapsulated some of these in her talk on war, politics and the media in the Trans-Caucasus. Eastern Europe now has freedom of expression but no means to achieve it in practice (no ink, no paper, no publishing houses). There is access to libraries but no fuel to heat them. There is freedom of information but freedom also to go hungry, homeless and uneducated. Freedom

also to go to war in which communities that previously co-existed under Communism are now killing each other and burning down libraries.

Vladimir Spiridonov of Mezhdunarodnaya Knizhnyy Dom Publishing House looked at Russian publishing, which has collapsed since the fall of Communism. There is a serious shortage of ink and paper and frequent breakdowns of machinery. The price of books has rocketed and the market, like many others in Russia today, is run by the Mafia. The Russian people, once considered the greatest readers in the world, are now reduced to begging in the streets.

A similar situation can be found in Poland. Runnalls Davis, the Library Association's International Officer, considered the British Council's role in library development in Poland during 'the transition'. The reality is that when Council staff visited Poland they found libraries that had not had a new book in three years, where photocopiers are unusual, microfilming unknown and where hard chairs proliferate.

Sylva Simsova, a freelance consultant, told the conference that "freedom of information returns to the Czech Republic." But inflation is increasing faster than library budgets and staff salaries are very poor. There is a diminishing supply of indigenous publications as subsidies for publishing dry up. The price of books is largely beyond the reach of ordinary Czechs. As a result most are bought by the rich minority.

Is it any wonder, given the havoc caused by nationalism and the market system in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, that the people are turning back to socialist parties and voting for them in increasing numbers, as they are in Hungary and East Germany? In Albania disenchantment with the regime has led increasing numbers to

yearn for "the good old days" under Communism. Isa Zymeri, UK representative of the Republic of Kosova, considered the freedom of expression of a divided people, the Albanians. yet even members of Albania's long-suffering ethnic Greek minority, esconced in the pale stone villages around the border, now admit they would willingly vote for the former Communists. Their view is that Albania is meant to be democratic, but in fact isn't. At least under Communism the Albanians knew what they could and couldn't say; what they could and couldn't do. Now they are told: "Talk and do whatever you like" and then, before they know it, they've been put in jail.

By far the best papers of the conference were those on Islam, Kenya and South Africa. Naim Turfan from the School of African and Oriental Studies looked at democracy and Islam, the question of political obligation in contemporary Muslim society. It is possible to be both democratic and Islamic. He reminded us that not all Muslims are gun-toting fanatics. Many so-called fundamentalist states are weak and take their failings out on dissidents. A state that is self-assured will respond to change and survive. Japan is strong and can survive numerous changes of leader. Rwanda lost one leader and thousands of people were killed because of the state's weakness. What is needed is not a religious state but a state of religious people. The individual should obey the state because they consent with it, not because they fear it. The Koran has been distorted by man. The ethics of the Koran should be incorporated into secular law. Finally, he averred that there was really no such thing as western democracy.

This point was picked up by Shiraz Durrani in his paper "The Mirage of Democracy in Kenya: the People's Struggle for Information as an Aspect of the Struggle for Liberation." Class dictatorship is putting on the garb of democracy, this is the propaganda of the ruling classes. The changes introduced by President Moi are cosmetic. While we sit here in Oxford talking about freedom of information, don't forget that countries such as Britain supplied the arms to sustain dictators such as Moi in Africa. Democracy in Africa, like the death of socialism, is no more than a myth. Many speakers at the conference had tried to make out there could be no democracy under socialism, but the two can - and do - co-exist. It is CNN, Coca-Cola and McDonald's - not socialism - that are destroying democracy.

Africa is being recolonised by the IMF and the World Bank. External forces are aided by local agents of imperialism. Chairman Mao championed the rights of the masses not to be exploited. China sent many books in Kiswahili to Kenya. Democracy is a means not an end, the end being to satisfy the basic needs of the majority of the people. Democracy for the transnationals, on the other hand, means their right to plunder the Third World. Shiraz concluded his paper with a number of resolutions, calling on the Library Association to: set up a register of the oppressed; establish collections of suppressed material; send material aid to developing countries; invite victims of oppression to conferences such as this; break the information blockade of countries such as Cuba; and publish newsletters to raise awareness in the UK.

Christopher Merrett, from the University of Natal, looked at the case for freedom of information in South

Africa. Human rights abuses, social, economic and political oppression and the move from colonialism to apartheid meant that no culture of openness developed in South Africa. One era of coercion and dull conformity was replaced by another and there is a danger of this happening again. Rights to information are still limited and librarians are taking a craven attitude. Multilateral talks were replaced by a bilateral discussion between the ANC and the NP to reach a political settlement. Discourse has been closed down on the grounds of reconciliation and national unity. The recent election had a negotiated result to satisfy all sides. State broadcasting is constrained and the ANC calls for "constructive reporting".

Apartheid has gone, but new laws on openness have not yet been passed. There is a high level of violence and many grass-roots organisations are not functioning. Indemnity provisions are still in place. The ANC is fearful of its past and there are rumours that two police informers are in the Cabinet. Many documents, including police records, have been shredded and ownership of the press is concentrated. The Criminal Procedures Act forces journalists to reveal the sources of their information and the law on defamation is unreformed. NGOs which played a major role in repackaging information for peasants and the illiterate are now in decline.

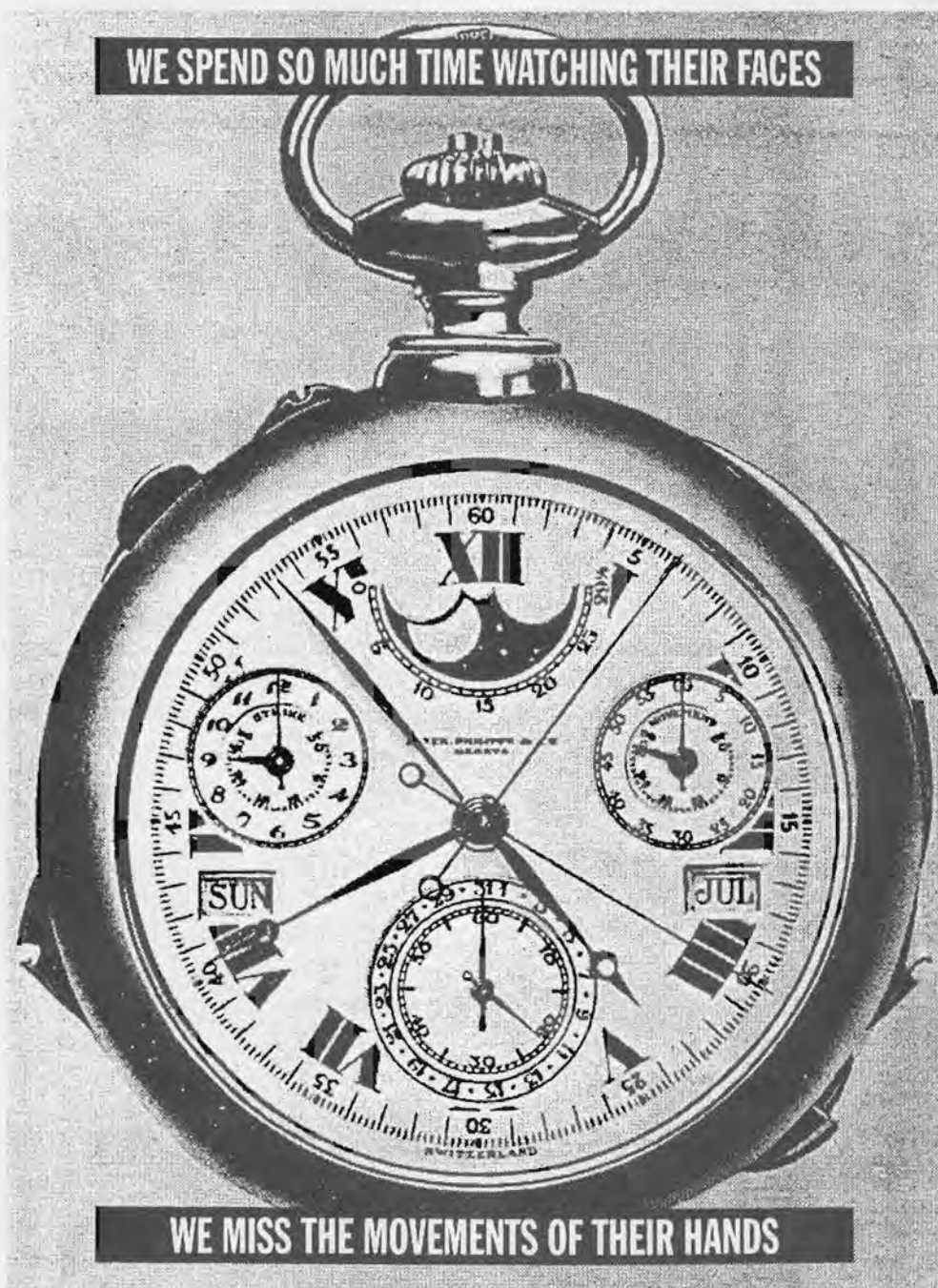
The conference failed to reach any conclusions or make any meaningful recommendations. The myth that the fall of Communism equals the emergence of democracy was rarely challenged. There was a general air of self-congratulatory relief: "Thank goodness we live in a free country." The Irish question was not explored, though it was pointed that Bosnian refugees who were beaten up in Essex

did not have confidence in the authorities to help them. The heavy emphasis on Europe reflected the eurocentricity of the Library Association and its International Committee and International Group.

For a serious analysis of emerging

John Pateman is co-editor, with Barbara Turfan of *From Hackney to Havana: Breaking the Information Blockade* (Birmingham: International Groups of the Library Association, 1994).

democracies and freedom of information an alternative conference needs to be organised with speakers from such organisations as Sinn Fein and from such countries as Cuba, North Korea, China and Vietnam.



The Mirage of Democracy in Kenya: People's Struggle for Information as an Aspect of the Struggle for Liberation

Shiraz Durrani

Dictatorship in the Garb of Democracy

The commonly-heard phrase "emerging democracies" seems to imply that democracy is emerging all over the world. A general impression has been created in the Western world that since the end of the Cold War, "democracy" was emerging in the world today. Nothing can be further from the truth. While we will not go into an analysis of what has happened in Eastern Europe and U.S.S.R., it should be remembered that the formation of a large number of political parties which may objectively represent the class interests of just one class does not automatically imply that there is "democracy". Nor does the existence of a Parliament in itself signify that there is democracy. Kenya, for example, has had a Parliament for over 30 years, but there is no democracy there yet.

In Africa, the struggle for democracy has by no means been won, although it may have reached a new level of intensity. The reality of what is happening in Kenya and in many other parts of Africa today is that class dictatorship is putting on the garb of democracy in a conspiracy to make the people believe that there is no need to struggle any more. People are being told that since socialism "no longer exists" we have "arrived" at the ideal society. We

seem to be victims of a massive confidence trick that shouts out ever so loud that "democracy" is suddenly emerging all over the world. It is as if somehow the Emperor will have his clothes on if only we shout out loud enough that he *does* have his clothes on. Alas, naked reality cannot be clothed so easily.

The call that "democracy has arrived" is no more than the propaganda of the ruling classes to disarm the activists of genuine democracy, to make them give up the struggle. It is yet another cunning tool used by those in power in the fierce class struggle going on everywhere. As such it is not likely to be heeded by the masses who know through their very life experiences that democracy cannot have arrived while they continue to be exploited.

It is very important for us working in the information field to question more closely why it is generally assumed by some intellectuals, particularly in Europe and U.S.A., that "democracy" is emerging. If we, who are supposed to be aware of the way information can - and is - manipulated by vested interests, if we can be fooled so easily, what example can we set to those who accept everything in print - and in the media - as the ultimate "truth". We have a particular duty to question and challenge

views that make implicit assumptions about the reality around us. That is where our "professional" duty lies.

It is true that important changes have taken place in many African countries in the last few years. Prof. Ali Mazrui lists the achievements of the struggle for democracy in Africa of 1980s and 1990s: "...some 20 countries in Africa have legalised political opposition since 1990. Military regimes have sometimes been forced to go to the polls (as in Ghana); founding fathers have been defeated at the polls(as in Zambia and Malawi); one-party systems have been forced to become multi-party (as in Kenya, Tanzania, and Cote d'Ivoire)." (1) South Africa is also on the road to democracy. These changes have come about as a result of years of struggle by the people themselves and because of changes in international situation. But unless these changes are followed by basic economic and democratic freedoms for the masses of the people, they will remain mere cosmetic changes.

It is not possible for those who are suffering in Somalia, in Rwanda, or for the victims of Western-backed Renamo thugs in Mozambique and the Savimbi mobs in Angola to believe that the dawn of "democracy" has suddenly emerged over the continent exploited for centuries by Western imperialism. Mere propaganda that there is democracy will not bring back to life those who died through bullets supplied by Western armaments industry. We should avoid the danger of judging the whole world from a Euro-centric perspective. It would be difficult, for example, for a Conference in Mogadishu, Nairobi or Kigale to set as its theme "Democracy has arrived". The reality of the anti-democratic forces outside the Conference room would only mock the

good intentions of the organisers. Indeed, an international Conference by the World Bar Association which was to have been held in Nairobi some years ago had to be called off because of Kenya's poor human rights record. A conference on law and order would indeed be ironic under a regime that has consistently manipulated national laws in order to serve its own class interests.

We should thus not be too eager to accept that "democracy" has arrived. We are victims of a vast propaganda offensive that seeks to convince us that socialism has died, that there is no democracy under socialism, that now there is freedom of information for "all". Admittedly CNN news broadcasts are now available all over the world, side by side with bottles of Coca Cola and its associated culture. But these manifestations of Western world's "riches" are a far cry from freedoms and democratic rights which are the basic rights of the people. Fundamental questions about social reality remain unanswered. We are made to believe that international events in the last few years have fundamentally changed the situation to the extent that social conflicts no longer exist. *Mpatanishi*, the internal organ of the underground **Mwakenya** movement in Kenya addresses this question in one of its articles:

"... these changes, however important they have been, have not resolved the basic contradiction [in society]. Classes have not been abolished, class struggle has not ceased. Mois and KANUs still exist and still are in power. Their major backer - U.S.-led imperialism - still exists, more powerful and ruthless than ever before. Social

oppression has not vanished; economic exploitation still deprives our people of the fruits of their labour. Children still die in their thousands through malnutrition and their parents are even today massacred and shot by forces of oppression that is the hallmark of capitalism." (2)

Mwakenya explains the current world situation thus: "Today, the post-Cold War situation is one of intensified neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is not dead. It is precisely because it is not dead, that it now takes on features of re-colonisation." (3) The **Kampala Declaration** recognises the reality of lack of democratic freedoms in Africa when it talks of "The New Imperialism": "The end of the cold war ushered in a new period of domination. The cold war has now been replaced by the unleashing of an intensified economic war against Africa spearheaded by the IMF and the World Bank. This war will lead to a new scramble for the recolonisation of Africa."(4). It is obvious that those struggling for democracy on the ground have found no evidence of any "democracy" emerging, but here in Oxford, thousands of miles from Africa, we seem to have detected African democracy!

Democracy in Africa can only be achieved on the basis of "attacking and combating the *external forces* that now threaten re-colonisation; we must also as ferociously attack and combat those social *forces within us* that ally with intensified neo-colonialism," as Mwakenya has said. That is precisely what the liberation forces in Africa are doing today. The freedom of information for the masses can become a reality only when this larger war has been won.

Freedom Not To Be Exploited

If we accept that there are classes in society today - and perhaps only the British Prime Minister John Major maintains that there are no classes in society - then we must also accept that freedom and democracy for one class implies bondage and dictatorship for other classes. Let us not forget the words of Mao on this:

"...Freedom and democracy do not exist in the abstract, only in the concrete. In a society rent by class struggle, if there is freedom for the exploiting classes to exploit the working people, there is no freedom for the working people not to be exploited; if there is democracy for the bourgeoisie, there is no democracy for the proletariat and other working people...Those who demand freedom and democracy in the abstract regard democracy as an end and not a means. Democracy sometimes seems to be an end, but it is in fact only a means. "

For the masses in Africa and elsewhere in the world, the fundamental question is this: is our society organised in such a way as to satisfy the basic material needs - food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education - of the majority of people? Democracy should be a means of ensuring that these basic needs of the people are met. For the Western business and hence government interests, democracy means the ability to

exploit Africa freely for its own profits. Thus for them Barre, Idi Amin, Mobutu, Moi and Banda pass as "democrats" since they allow Western business to have a free hand in making mega-profits. They are accorded the seal of approval by the so-called World Bank, which is no more than the financial arm of the same forces that deny democracy to the people of the world. But the people can never see these tyrants as democrats.

The term "democracy" needs to be defined clearly. "Democracy" as seen by the U.S.A. government or the World Bank means that there is freedom for transnationals to plunder freely the resources of countries of Africa, Asia, and South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. So long as they are able to extract profits from a country, they are satisfied to call it "democratic". Thus unpopular and dictatorial regimes of Mobutus and Moises are considered "democratic" because they allow their countries to be used by Western business interests. Africa today is in a situation where for every £ that comes in as aid or investment, over £9 are taken out. There cannot be democracy for African people while this level of exploitation is allowed to go on. The first requirement for the achievement of democracy is that the £9 that leave Africa are made available to African masses for their own development. No amount of pious pleading for democracy and "aid" can alter this basic fact.

Important questions that have thus to be answered include the all-important one, "democratic freedom for whom, to do what?" The freedom of a few to exploit the many does not imply that there is democracy. From the people's point of view democratic freedom means the easy availability of basic requirements for

survival: food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, culture etc. To them freedom for foreign businesses to exploit local labour and resources certainly does not qualify as "democracy".

Our role as information workers is not to obscure the facts of exploitation and lack of democracy in these societies. Rather it is to expose oppression and show theoretical and practical sources of information which will help people end exploitation and enable people to enjoy all democratic rights. It is in this sense that librarianship is a "social" discipline which can play a leading role in providing relevant information to people.

The Tears & the Triumphs

Democracy does not just "emerge" in a vacuum. Events outside the country, however significant, will not, on their own give birth to democracy. Democracy is always achieved as a result of a struggle, often violent struggle by the people themselves. It often demands the sacrifice of many lives.

The current struggle for democracy and freedom of information in Africa has demanded a heavy sacrifice from the people, including rape, jailings, detentions, exiling, disappearances, murders and massacres. The triumphs of the struggle for democracy are inevitably accompanied by tears of the tragic loss of life. The loss in terms of missed development opportunities cannot even be measured.

A number of recent events highlight the achievements and the suffering as a result of people's resolve to fight for liberation. The first incident is from Kenya: On March 16, 1994 four journalists including the Managing Editor and deputy Chief

Sub-Editor working with the daily **The Standard** (Nairobi) were charged with subversion for publishing an article reporting renewed political violence in Molo, Kenya. They were denied bail and were remanded in custody in Nakuru prison. Six other journalists had also been arrested earlier.

The four face a charge of subversion "for an act prejudicial to the security of the state" for writing a report on an incident which occurred in Molo on 12 and 13 March 1994. Amnesty International records the incident: "Nine people were allegedly killed in the violence and hundreds fled their homes. The journalists' report named an eyewitness who said that her three children were killed...Molo is in a restricted area in the Rift Valley province - designated a "Security Operation Zone" in September 1993. Only residents, officials and police can visit the area, preventing information about political violence in the area from being reported or verified." (5). In a recent report Amnesty International says:

"Since January 1994 over 14 journalists have been intimidated, harassed, arrested, fined or imprisoned; whole editions of journals have been impounded and printing presses have been put out of action. These actions by the Kenyan authorities have seriously undermined the right to freedom of expression in Kenya."(6)

So much for democracy and freedom of information in Kenya.

This one incident is merely an indication of the level of oppression in Kenya today and indicates the total disregard for human

rights in Kenya. Yet the Kenyan Government passes the Western Governments' test of "democracy". Such poor standards would not be accepted in Europe - but Africa is another matter.

The second incident indicates the Western control of Africa's system of communication through its control over communications technology. The scene is the prestigious 7th Pan African Congress held in Kampala in April 1994. One delegate who could not attend was Col. Gaddafi of Libya. As an alternative, it was agreed that his message to the Congress would be beamed to Kampala through communication satellite. But this was sabotaged by the government of U.S.A. which uses its control of communication technology to suppress the voice of those it dislikes. Undeterred by the show of strength by U.S.A., the delegates of the PAC passed a resolution condemning U.S. action and went on to show their solidarity with the people of Libya by accepting their invitation to host the 8th Pan African Congress in Tripoli in 1987.

Who are the Enemies of Democracy?

If we agree that there is no democracy in many parts of Africa who then is responsible for this lack of democracy? The Conference's theme that democracy is now emerging implies that it was the Soviet Union which was responsible for lack of democracy. Africa was colonised by the Western powers, starting with the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884. It was the search for cheap raw materials and labour and the availability of ready markets that drove the colonial powers to claim continents for their own use. Kenya, for example, has had to face over 400 years of

plunder by European powers. It was the struggles of African peoples that brought about independence. But after independence, it was the same Western countries that brought in neo-colonialism in order to continue the exploitation of African people and resources. Soviet Union had nothing to do with this unequal relationship. Indeed it provided valuable material and moral support to the African liberation movements.

There have been no changes in the West that would inspire them to give up their exploitation of Africa. The culture of exploitation is the very *basis* of capitalism and imperialism which is still very much alive. The end of the Cold War has not changed the nature of imperialism. Indeed it now has a totally free hand to exploit and bully whoever it dislikes without the fear of being opposed by a principled socialist state. It then follows that no democracy will "emerge" in Africa through the goodwill of the Western exploitative forces. It is the active struggle by the people against imperialism that alone can liberate Africa and usher in a new democracy. And that is precisely what the masses in Africa are doing today. But it is not an easy struggle. Imperialism and its local allies will go to any length to preserve their positions of power and maintain dictatorship. Witness the devastation brought to the people of Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique, and Angola as the price for struggling against a situation created by neo-colonialism. In every case it is the forces supported by imperialism who would rather wreck whole societies than allow democracy to prevail.

Kenya - "Uhuru Bado" (7)

Kenya is a very good example of a country where there is no democracy even after 30 years of independence. Fundamental changes are needed before democracy can emerge. As Mwakenya has said, "...no meaningful changes would take place as long as Moism and KANUism - with or without Moi and KANU - are still in existence. Mwakenya has always believed that the Moi-KANU government could not be trusted to oversee the democratization of our society. For Moi and KANU are themselves the problem... Let us not be deceived that just because the opposition parties have their members in parliament that they will be in a position to effect any fundamental changes. Because, in order to ensure that the representatives Kenyans elected do not achieve their objectives, the Moi-KANU government has manipulated the Parliament."(8)

We saw earlier that parts of Kenya are declared "Security Zone". This ensures that nobody is allowed to go there to bring back a report about the real situation. In effect it is an attempt by the Government to stop free flow of information about the massacres being organised by those in power. Past massacres in Kenya have included the ones in Garissa (1980), and in Wajir (1984). Such massacres have continued. Says Human Rights Watch/Africa:

"Political violence has continued to affect the rural areas of western Kenya. In November 1993, Human Rights Watch/Africa estimated that 1,500 people had died and 300,000 had been displaced since the "ethnic clashes"

first broke out in late October 1991...even high-ranking members of the government [of Kenya] are involved in provoking violence."(9)

These have resulted in massive protests inside the country and externally. The unpopular government cannot survive in power without periodic massacres to silence people's protests. The "solution" that the regime has hit on is not to stop massacres, but to prevent the news of the massacre from reaching the country or the world. All this is happening after the so-called liberalisation which allowed "multi-party" elections to take place. This shows not only that there is no democracy "emerging" in Kenya, but that there is no freedom of information either.

The murder of Pinto in 1965 was a clear indication that the hopes of achieving a democratic society were dashed. Since then all effective opposition to the Western-backed regime has gone underground. The main one was the **December Twelve Movement** which emerged in mid-80s as **Mwakenya**. It was these underground movements that continued the struggle for democratic change throughout the period after independence.

One of the methods that the underground movements have used to mobilise supporters and to communicate with them is through underground publications. No open publications could have been issued as there is a strict censorship which detains, exiles, "disappears" anybody considered to be behind these publications. Printers, journalists and publishers are particular targets of the regime. The underground movements thus resorted to

organise underground presses and distribution networks. Thus in the early 80s the **December Twelve Movement** published **Pambana** which was distributed throughout the country using an underground network. Earlier, the organisation which preceded it, **Cheche Kenya** issued an underground book **InDependent Kenya** (later reissued in London by Zed Press). Similarly Mwakenya has been issuing its mass publication, *Mzalendo Mwakenya*. Mwakenya has also published its **Draft Minimum Programme** (1987), the **Democracy Plank** (1991), **The Mwakenya Stand on the Current Situation in Kenya** (1992) in English and Kiswahili - all published underground. Such publications could not have been issued overground. Even reading or possessing copies of these publication can lead to long jail terms or detention. There have been some improvement in the situation in recent years and newspapers like *The Nation* publishes "Free opinion" columns. Yet there is a limit to such freedoms and certainly publications of underground organisations are still banned, in practice, if not in law. The Special Branch police remain as watchful as ever.

It was the vision and the programme carried in these underground publications that gave people guidance and courage to openly defy the Government in 1990. What came to be known as the events of Saba Saba ("Seven Seven" - seventh day of the seventh month - July 7, 1990), Kenyans throughout the country defied the regime's armed forces and organised mass demonstrations and meetings. The regime was shaken by the week's events. It made token gestures of change in order to prevent genuine change. The result was

the amendment to the Constitution that allowed "multi-party" elections.

But this was no democracy. It was merely white-washing the dictatorship to give it the appearance of democracy. Mwakenya warned against the danger of "Moism with or without Moi". The momentum for real change was diverted by the cunning tactic of giving democratic garb to a ruthless dictatorship. Democracy remains to be achieved - "Uhuru bado", as the popular Kiswahili saying goes.

The whole experience in Kenya since independence shows that it is not possible to disseminate any information which is in any way critical of the ruling class and indeed of imperialism. Any suggestions of an alternate method of development is not tolerated. There are many cases of people sentenced to long jail terms for entries made in their private diaries. The only way that such information can be disseminated is through the use of underground press. The use of theatre, music, and other creative methods to disseminate progressive information is also widely practised but is also attacked. Thus the regime destroyed the largest peasant-built open air theatre in Africa at Kamiriithu because it disagreed with the *content* of the plays put up there. But the struggle continues to be waged at various levels. The lesson of the whole struggle is that democracy will not emerge on its own. It needs a constant struggle to be waged. A crucial input for democracy to emerge is the dissemination of appropriate information that is relevant, in an appropriate form and language.

The various underground documents have now become basic texts on the history of Kenya. They form an authentic documentation of what is happening in Kenya today. The so-called "democracy"

in Kenya today, with its multi-party elections is exposed as a sham by Mwakenya in its statement at the 7th Pan African Congress:

"The registration of opposition parties under Moi's conditions has been more beneficial to the Moi-Kanu regime than to the people of Kenya, since it allows Moi to shout multiparty democracy to cover the sounds of gunfire and the cries of the tortured."

Until there is a genuine democracy, there will not be freedom to write, publish, disseminate, or even to read information for the people. It is only the final liberation that will ensure these freedoms in Kenya, as in other countries.

Information For Liberation or for Enslavement?

The only effective means of ensuring free flow of information in many African countries is through the underground press. This is true for literary and creative works, songs, music and drama, as well as for political, social, economic and other works of non-fiction. Indeed resistance literature has been recognised as an important literary form. This is due to *internal* oppression from the Western-supported dictators. Ali Mazrui highlights the *international* aspect of information control:

"The Western media not only inform the West about the rest of the world. They also inform the rest of the world about the rest of the world. For example, what

Africa knows about China comes disproportionately from Western sources. ...Unfortunately, the West is a flawed go-between - a messenger with its own agenda, subject to its own special biases.

Pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe from the late 1980s were heavily covered in the Western press. Western television screen allocated massive time to what was regarded as momentous historical events. Similar pro-democracy activism occurred in Africa. And yet these developments have received far less publicity in the Western media..."(10)

Yet it is not entirely true to say that there is no freedom of information in Kenya. While news about the atrocities committed by government-funded gangs is not readily available, information which suits the interests of those in power is easily available. Meaningful news and information about resistance, peoples' struggles, achievements, about relevant technologies that can improve productivity and quality of life of masses which at the same time lessen the burden of labour is either absent or distorted. But there is no lack of useless, sensation-creating information from around the world. In general, information about protest and resistance to *status quo*, about people-orientated development strategy, about the real causes and cures of exploitation is not easy to disseminate. Thus we must distinguish between information for liberation and information for slavery. The former is in short supply, the latter

available in abundance.

It is only the information that encourages subservience and the acceptance of the role of the under-dog that is freely available. Information that can liberate people's minds and provide a way out of social oppression and economic exploitation is not tolerated by those who thereby stand to lose their power. This situation is a reflection of the class forces in Africa: the comprador rulers of Africa seek to keep the masses in a state of ignorance in order to remain in power. The interest of the working people, on the other hand, requires a free flow of information. In the absence of "official" information services that serve their needs, people develop their own oral, written, and visual forms to ensure communication as part of their social struggle. Thus their information activities are a direct threat to the ruling classes. Hence the total lack of tolerance in countries like Kenya for anyone "caught" disseminating information of interest to working people.

Free flow of information in such conditions can only be achieved when this antagonistic social contradiction between the masses and their imposed, non-democratic rulers is resolved. It can only come about when the class whose material need requires free flow of information - i.e. working class, is in control of its own destiny.

The Struggle Continues

The Kampala Declaration sounded an ominous note:

"The control of Africa remains in foreign hands. In most African countries, imperialism has the

cooperation and compliance of the ruling elite. The overall result is that Africa is being forced into dangerous levels of economic impoverishment, social decay, and chemical genocide."

But the story does not end there. The Declaration recognises a redeeming feature in the present situation: "In Africa...mass uprisings are once again manifesting themselves from Cairo to Durban." It is the very lack of democracy that causes uprisings against corrupt regimes. It is this people's action, guided by correct ideology, party and strategy that will bring about true democracy and liberation. Only then will information flow freely throughout the society.

It would be of inestimable value if the library and information profession as a whole could make concrete contributions towards fulfilling social responsibilities such as I have discussed here. In particular I believe that the [profession in the U.K. should take practical steps to support information workers in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific who are victimised for ensuring free flow of information in their societies.

These should include:

- Maintaining a Register of victims of information suppression who are victimised for their professional work and social commitment. Practical offers of help and support for them should be made; organising campaigns for their rights to free expression, assembly etc.

- Maintaining a collection of suppressed material (publications, music, etc), publicising their contents and making such material widely available on request.
- Providing paper, typewriters, computers, FAX machines etc to support the work of those struggling to maintain free flow of information in oppressive conditions.
- Inviting victims of information suppression to conferences.
- Exploring ways of breaking information embargoes by providing practical support to those struggling under difficult conditions.
- Publishing a quarterly newsletter to report progress on above projects and to provide a forum for exchange of ideas, views, and information on issues related to free flow of information.
- Ensuring wider awareness in Britain about issues connected with suppression of information.

All the above can be done in conjunction with other international bodies such as Amnesty International, PEN, Index on Censorship etc. Special funding should be sought from LA as well as from international bodies such as UNESCO, and from European organisations.

This is an edited version of a paper delivered at the Residential Conference on Emerging Democracies and Freedom of Information, Somerville College, Oxford, 2-4 September 1994.

Notes

1. Mazrui, Ali., "Brave New World of Media Bias", *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), 17 July 1994, 7.
 2. "Capitalism and Socialism: has the Contradiction been resolved?" *Mpatanishi: Internal Organ of Mwakenya* 2(1), September 1992, 11-12.
 3. "Stop Moi's State of Terrorism Against the Kenyan People; The Statement of Mwakenya at the 7th. Pan-African Congress, Kampala, Uganda, 3-8 April 1994...", p.1.
 4. *Kampala Declaration*, Declaration by the Delegates and Participants at the 7th. Pan-African Congress, 3-8 April 1994, Kampala, Uganda, p.4
 5. *AFR 32/05/94*, 24 March 1994, Amnesty International.
 6. *AFR 32/12/94: Kenya: the Imprisonment of Two Prisoners of Conscience*, 27 July 1994, Amnesty International.
 7. "Uhuru Bado" is Kiswahili for "No Independence Yet."
 8. *Mzalendo Mwakenya* (Special Issue), 1 May 1994, 1,4. [This is Mwakenya's underground publication]
 9. "Kenya: Multipartyism Betrayed in Kenya: Continuing Rural Violence and Restrictions on Freedom of Speech and Assembly", *Human Rights/Africa Newsletter* 6 (5), July 1994, 2, quoting from its own report: *Divide and Rule: State Sponsored Ethnic Violence in Kenya*, 1993.
 10. Mazrui, Ali, op. cit.
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THE MORE WE LOOK THE MORE THEY HIDE



SCRUTINY IS OUR ONLY SELF-DEFENSE

IT = Information Terrorism?

Chris Atton

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act is now law, due in no small part to the consistent media portrayal of the likely victims of its many clauses as marginal groups. *The Times* wholly misjudged the situation when it called them "An alliance of New Age travellers, rock festival fans and squatters." There have been exceptions, of course, offering a semblance of balance. *The Independent* noted that it would make "innocent ^{people into} ~~its~~ enemies of the state", but in the main it was left to the public - with the support of groups such as Liberty - to protest against some of the most repressive legislation these islands have ever seen. By effectively removing the right to peaceful protest, by restricting movement, by giving the police unprecedented powers of stop and search, by removing the right to silence; we must ask: are we still living in a democracy?

The relevance of the Act to library and information workers has gone largely unremarked, yet its provisions should not be lightly dismissed as only applying to other people. As upright professional people, what could we possibly fear from the Act? I have in front of me two books, both legally available in Britain, not obscene or blasphemous. Yet under the Act they could well make me - or anyone who might possess them - a criminal. They are *Towards a Citizens' Militia: Anarchist Alternatives to NATO and the Warsaw Pact* and *Selective Assassination as an Instrument of National Policy*. The latter is an anonymous document purporting to come from the US administration (National Security Council?) and its title gives a clear indication of its content. The former is a (rather vague) manual intended to be used in the event of civil war or armed insurrection.

Since the Act makes it a criminal offence to collect or possess, "without authorisation", "any information which is of such a nature to be useful to terrorists", does my very possession of these titles now make me a criminal? Certainly if the police and the courts so wish, since much of the power of the new Act lies in how it might be interpreted. There have already been fears expressed that such a provision might be used against investigative journalists and researchers whom the government want to silence; why might it not be used against the providers of such information, namely, writers, publishers, distributors, bookshops and libraries? Are we to see a tightening up of what is acquired by libraries "just to be on the safe side"? Will this include the fictional -though accurate and informative - details of bomb-making and the activities of the secret state contained in the books of such as Len Deighton and John le Carre? I think not. What it may well mean is a further marginalisation of any literature not already accepted into the mainstream that might be considered "controversial".

We have approached the Library Association for its opinion on the matter. At the time of writing we still await a reply. Let us hope it does not come too late.

Letter from South Africa

Christopher Merrett

One Sunday evening, a political correspondent was interviewing a local politician in a regional television studio. An angry rival burst in, abusing the interviewee and brining the programme to a halt, while a heavily-armed mob of his supporters clashed with security personnel at the front door.

A banana republic in which the gun speaks louder than the vote? A post-Communist state riven by nationalism? No; this is post-apartheid South Africa. The studio was in Durban and the angry intervention came from none other than the National Minister of Home Affairs, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The immediate cause was a dispute over the position of chief advisor to the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini, in the past a client of Inkatha but now seeking an accommodation with the ANC.

South Africa is very much the world's favourite nation at present, a paragon of international virtue providing rhetorical fodder from Westminster Abbey to the White House lawn. It has an excellent new constitution containing a Bill of Rights promising freedom of expression, association and information. But these are just words on paper when a minister can terminate a broadcast and have his lame excuse (that he thought the programme was finished) accepted by his cabinet colleagues.

The whole episode has been quietly brushed under the carpet in spite of public outrage from the South African Broadcasting Corporation, political parties (all of them except the pro-apartheid Conservative party and, of course, Inkatha) and human rights groups. It would appear that the freedoms, both proactive and protective, launched with great fanfare, in April can be arbitrarily kicked aside by a politician with a grievance. The fact that this is a good old tradition - broadcasters in the apartheid years routinely took orders from Cabinet ministers - says little for democracy in the new South Africa.

The more outspoken commentators predicted the political demise of Chief Buthelezi as a result of his behaviour. This completely misread the signs of the times: government unity will be preserved at any price, regardless of the cost to civil liberties, in the name of reconciliation, in the name of reconciliation, reconstruction and development.

South Africa is now hostage to a new agenda of conformism described elegantly by Christopher Hope, the novelist and social commentator: "there has not been such a rush of patriots eager to please a new government - well, not since the rush of patriots eager to please the old government. Though it does not do to say so for you might be declared 'counter-revolutionary' ... in much the same tones as dissenters in the old South Africa were called 'Communists' and advised to go back to Ghana." (1) Talking to people about recent developments one is struck by the fact that those who defended apartheid in the past ("I oppose apartheid, but ...") are now just as uncritical about the new order. In fact they are probably exactly the same people.

Nelson Mandela's recent harsh criticism of Bishop Desmond Tutu for articulating the feelings of many that the major achievement of post-apartheid South Africa is an emerging *nomenklatura* of over-paid and over-privileged politicians and bureaucrats

(the so-called gravy train) is a case in point. One of the major barriers to freedom of information, expression and the media in South Africa is pressure to conform to the bland idea that it is already a democracy. Deification of the South African condition and its leaders by the international community simply compounds this unhealthy situation.

1. *Independent on Sunday*, 18 September 1994, 17.

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Alternative Press Review: POB 1446, Columbia, MO 65205-1446, USA

Freethought History and People's Culture: Box 5224, Kansas City, Kansas 66119, USA

Journal of Information Ethics: McFarland and Co., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA

International Group of the Library Association: 25 Bromford Gardens, Westfield Road, Birmingham, England, B15 3XD

Librarians at Liberty: 1716 SW Williston Road, Gainesville, FL 32608, USA

LIWO: c/o University Library, PO Box 375, Pietermaritzburg 3200, South Africa

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